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Bureau du  
Sous-Ministre

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May 28, 1992

Christopher G. Brown  
President, Ottawa Chapter  
The Allergy and Environmental  
Health Association  
6267 Castille Court  
Orleans, Ontario  
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Dear Mr. Brown:

As my recent correspondence with you has indicated, since our meeting last October a Ministry working group on environmental hypersensitivity was convened at my request to review the reports, the literature and the issues that you and others have raised about the condition and those who are ill. This included a review of the Thomson Report and Ministry of Health activities since publication of the report.

I have reviewed the report of the working group which has now been concluded.

There was general agreement among members of the working group, that, as the Health and Welfare Report of the Environmental Sensitivities Workshop states, some individuals may be unusually sensitive to chemicals and other substances in the environment. The sensitivities may result in illness and psychosocial debility. Unfortunately, it is not possible to establish a more definitive statement about environmental sensitivities for lack of an adequate case definition of this condition.

The wide range of reported symptoms, the lack of an acceptable case definition, and the fact that physical assessments and laboratory tests that are currently accepted by the medical community do not reveal abnormalities, make

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the delineation of environmental sensitivities from other conditions a difficult, if not impossible, exercise. The conclusion that has been reached by me and the working group is that undertaking further research is the most appropriate approach to solving the puzzles that sensitivities present. As research results are produced, they will be made available through the communications and information programs of the Ministry and scientific publications.

This does not mean that other initiatives than research should not be pursued. Those who are ill should be treated with respect, understanding and compassion. The anomalous nature of illness due to environmental sensitivities should not, as a matter of course, provide the indication that a psychiatric diagnosis is appropriate.

Representatives of the Mental Health Facilities Branch and the provincial psychiatric hospitals have offered to meet with you. You may wish to pursue the discussion with J. Howard Danson and his staff (416-327-7584).

It has also been suggested that, if you take exception to the position of the Public Health Branch of the Ministry with respect to environmental sensitivities, you should contact Dr. Richard Schabas (416-327-7392) who is the Director of the branch and Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario. You may want to discuss with him the results and implications of the presentations on environmental sensitivities that were sponsored by the Ottawa-Carleton District Health Council (April 1990) for the general public and health professionals.

You and I have discussed other concerns that you have about redressing individual grievances. I have come to the conclusion that it is not possible to provide redress for individual situations within the Ministry through my office. However, the provincial government provides a number of mechanisms for reviewing and hearing complaints about health care: the Health Services Appeal Board, the Health Facilities Appeal Board and the Hospital Appeal Board. Medical care issues can be brought to the attention of the Registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. As well, the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office has representatives in each of the provincial psychiatric hospitals.

As you know, the complaint procedures of Ombudsman Ontario and the Ontario Human Rights Commission are also available to you.

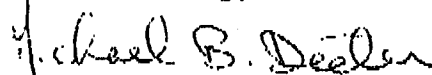
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Our review of environmental sensitivity issues and literature has been undertaken with the intent to seek solutions and with concern for those who are ill. I understand that you are preparing a statement on environmental sensitivities for the Ministry to review. I look forward to receiving it.

As the results of the research the Ministry is funding become available, I expect there will be continuing opportunities for the Ministry to review the issue with the medical profession and other interested people.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Decter  
Deputy Minister

